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ABSTRACT

Discussing the "Whole Language and More '93" meeting, this paper presents a series of helpful how-to's (and some valuable caveats) for those involved in conference planning. The first part of the paper presents a discussion of 10 steps the conference organizer would take again, including: promoting the conference; organizing various chairs; offering variable registration fees; thinking big and small when formulating a budget; spreading ownership as widely as possible; and offering a variety of conference sites. The second part of the paper discusses 10 things the conference organizer would do differently, including: utilize persons of color more widely and effectively; use professionals to process money and registrations; establish a more realistic timeline for printing the program and assembling the conference packet; secure more cosponsors; charge exhibitors more; and do a better job of giving credit where credit is due. (RS)

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Whole Language and More '93

(If I Had It All to Do Over Again)

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Note to Users of the ERIC System: What follows is an expanded version of "Whole Language & More '93 (If I Had It All To Do Over Again)," presented to the Spring Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English in March, 1993. The original paper called for a degree of interaction between the presenter and those attending the session; expansions are intended in fill in the blanks.

Whole Language and More '93 was a highly successful meeting (both in terms of its impact and in a fiscal sense) of English and language arts teachers held at Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, Georgia in February, 1993. The paper is intended to be a series of helpful how-to's (and some valuable *caveats*) for those involved in conference planning.

Jim Brewbaker, who chaired Whole Language and More '93 and authored this piece, would be pleased to further discuss issues raised here. For readers who communicate via Internet, his bitnet address is Brewby@USCN.BITNET. His FAX # is [706] 568-2084.

Ten Steps I'd Take Again
(If I Had It All to Do Over Again)

Jim Brewbaker -- April 17, 1993

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1. PROMOTE, PROMOTE, PROMOTE

The conference title, "Whole Language & More, K-12" (1, 2, 3 ad nauseam) is a winner and should be continued, no matter what. Our theme, derived in part from the popular children's book of the same name also seemed to capture people's imagination. "Very Hungry Caterpillars -- Teachers, Children, & Teens Becoming."

The fact that Callaway Gardens provided 300 little jars of preserves was a clear plus as far as conference promotion was concerned.

I recommend sending letters to staff development coordinators and curriculum directors (April and September '92 promoting February conference) which (1) offer special rates ($5 below non-member rate for school/system sending 10+ participants) and (2) encourage staff development utilization. The second letter was a reminder that flyers were in the mail, the good deal was still available, and so forth.

Given our West Central Georgia location, it made sense to acquire free NCTE mailing labels for Georgia and Alabama. I suggest that we continue this practice and believe we'll pull 50-100 registrants from Auburn, Birmingham, etc. We also should make it a point to advertise at regional & other state conferences (Georgia, Alabama, Florida), contact out-of-state affiliate leaders, send announcements to affiliate publications, put out stacks of flyers at NCTE conventions/conference in November & March/April, at reading associations, at the Georgia Technology Conference (April), among early childhood groups, librarians, and others.

The Conference Chair or Publicity Chair should prepare regular news items in Scribbles & Bits.

This was the timeline for the 1993 meeting:

first announcement (with major speaker(s): 12 months;

call for proposals: 6 months;

membership mailing with registration materials: 4-5 months

2. ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE

I took a page out of Bob Harvey's NCTE convention book to call on "People who owe you one" to carry out major chair-ships. I also relied on people I'd worked with during the 1990 convention.

We held these meetings at Callaway Gardens:

Planning Committee: 10 months and 1 month before meeting

Program Committee: 8 months and 3 months before meeting

On-site meetings build ownership in the conference -- even a sense of excitement.

I am accused of being too organized. Perhaps I am. Here are the major roles and functions I established for Whole Language & More 93. Those in brackets, however, are positions which, if I were chair again, I would want to appoint.

General Conference Chair

Associate Chair for Program

- Hospitality (presiders -- keynoter travel & amenities)
- Liaison to GCTE Executive Committee
- Program
  - Feedbag Forum
  - [Headliner Workshops]
  - [Evaluation]
- Printing/Publicity (split into two positions)
- AV/Room Arrangements (split)
- [Staff Development/State & Local School System Liaison]
- [Special Events]
  - Idea Exchange
  - Evening at the Springer
  - Karaoke Party

Associate Chair for Arrangements

- Meals/Receptions
- Exhibits
  - NCTE exhibit
  - GCTE/NCTE store
  - [Cosponsored events (meals/breaks/speakers)]
- Finance
  - [Assistant Finance Chair]
- [Local Promotions]
  - Restaurant Guide

[Door Prizes & Goodies]

3. OFFER VARIABLE REGISTRATION FEES

As we have known for several years, it was valuable to provide a distinct dollar incentive for members. We enrolled as many as 200 or more new members among Whole Language & More 93 registrants.

Here were our Advanced Registration Rates:

2-day fee for members:	$35.00
non-members:	$45.00
School system rates:	$40.00
Pre-service teachers:	$25.00

GCTE provided on-day registration option ($30 and $35) and on-site registration ($40 and $55). I think these options should be continued.

4. RIDE THE TIDE OF HOT TOPICS SUCH AS WHOLE LANGUAGE

GCTE is making plans for Whole Language 4 for now. What will be hot in '95, '97?

5. THINK BIG AND SMALL WHEN FORMULATING A BUDGET

Think small to make sure you make your budget. With the following history and prospects, we budgeted "small" to break even with 500 participants.

> Whole Language 1: 1000 participants at campus-based meeting in central Georgia, 50+ miles to interstates, 100 miles from Metro Atlanta (inexpensive housing, meals, & facilities); speaker: Ken Goodman
>
> Whole Language 2: 1100+ participants at school-based meeting in same locale; speaker: Yetta Goodman
>
> Whole Language 3: Deepening recession, move to more costly resort setting in West Central Georgia with amenities, 12 miles off interstate, 65 miles from Metro Atlanta; speakers Donald Graves, Mary Lindquist (NCTM President), and Richard Lederer (secondary appeal)

Think big to help fund organizational programs (student writing publication -- We enjoyed $13,500 plus profit with 1100 registrants.)

6. GIVE PARTICIPANTS THEIR MONEY'S WORTH WHILE MAKING MONEY FOR THE ORGANIZATION

I feel that it makes sense to profit from conferences but to provide "goodies" in keeping with the amount of anticipated profit. With Whole Language & More 3, once we have 700-800 registrants, it was clear that we were likely to make a substantial profit. This gave us the opportunity to put more money into reception, dinner, and Springer events.

Even so, conference finances are (in my right-brain way of looking at things) a scary but necessary evil. Here are a few insights I have gained, both from Atlanta '90 and Whole Language & More 3.

Most food services are charged on a per-person basis. Coffee breaks, which require more set-up and clean-up, are much more expensive than "coke" breaks.

Some may feel that we spent too much on the reception. This, of course, is a judgment call. With 1,100 registrants, we planned for 700 people and spent $8, a whopping outlay of $5,600 x 1.235 percent. Not nearly that many attended the affair, which I ascribe in part to the fact that we drew "amateur" conference-goers rather than seasoned veterans who know to eat and

drink as much as possible at receptions in order to avoid dinner expenses. Of course, we might have promoted it better, somehow.

Luckily, we were able to use reception leftovers all evening long -- which lent a festive air (to say the least) to the karaoke party.

7. BORROW AV HARDWARE FROM LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

GCTE probably saved $2,000-2-500 at Whole Language 3 by using AV from Columbus College, RESA's, and Muscogee County Schools.

8. SPREAD OWNERSHIP AS WIDELY AS POSSIBLE

Several factors led me to conclude that "our" meeting might not be thought of a "our" meeting by everyone. Here is my sizing up of the history of such meetings GCTE has been associated with.

1972-present: Summer conference at University of Georgia (UGA) in which UGA takes primary role, and GCTE has been "junior partner."

1980-present: Writing conference in Atlanta sponsored by Georgia State (GSU) in which GSU takes primary role and GCTE has been "coat-tails cosponsor."

1985-1991: An area workshop in Milledgeville with a strong Georgia College (GC) connection which led into the Whole Language 1, 2, 3 series.

A Possible Problem: UGA people ignored GSU and GC events; GSU people ignored UGA and GC, and so forth.

Solution: For Whole Language 3, we made a point of assigning roles to faculty and others from UGA, GSU, and GC. <u>We sought to spread ownership geographically, across levels, across college and public school people.</u>

9. FIND HOUSEHOLD NAMES TO BE MAJOR SPEAKERS

1991-93: Goodman, Goodman, Graves

Future: Atwell, Calkins, Paulsen?

10. OFFER VARIETY IN CONFERENCE SITES

1972-1990:	Annual summer conference at UGA with attendance 250-450
1991-1993:	Whole Language and More conference in Milledgeville (91 and 92), Callaway Gardens (93)
1994:	Greater Atlanta
1995:	Savannah? Try for Southeast Regional Affiliates Conference?

Ten Things I'd Do Differently

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1. UTILIZE PERSONS OF COLOR MORE WIDELY AND EFFECTIVELY

Minority members were prominent as associate chair of conference, as keynote introducer, as podium guests. On the other hand, both keynoters were white males. I think we can do better than that.

2. CHOOSE CONFERENCE SITE BIG ENOUGH FOR MEETING

Callaway Gardens is an excellent well-run facility which GCTE stretched to the limits of its capabilities. We should not go back there given the probable size of the meeting in '94, '95 and beyond.

3. USE PROFESSIONALS TO PROCESS MONEY, REGISTRATIONS, ETC.

This, I suspect, is an unresolved issue among GCTE executive committee members. Continuing education divisions in Georgia charge $5 or more per registrant for brochure design, mailing, and registration processing. I don't know whether this includes on-site registration or not. For a meeting run by those with minimal secretarial assistance, student volunteers to stuff envelopes, pull labels, and the like, the cost of such services is probably well worth it. (Simply build the cost into conference budget and don't worry about it.)

We should be cautious about entering contracts/agreements with a continuing education division. In particular, organizations should negotiate regarding who is taking up-front risks for the conference (and in what proportion) and how profits are to be split.

We did have all hotel reservations go directly to the Callaway Gardens Inn.

4. ESTABLISH A LOCAL BANK ACCOUNT AND APPOINT A LOCAL FINANCE CHAIR OR ASSISTANT

For Whole Language 3, recall, both the Finance Chair and the conference checking account were located cross-state. As highly efficient as Wayne is, there were times when either a local account or local assistant finance chair (or both) would have been highly desirable.

5. ESTABLISH MORE REALISTIC TIMELINE FOR PRINTING PROGRAM, ASSEMBLING CONFERENCE PACKET AND HANDOUTS

It is difficult to fully grasp how much time it takes to prepare 1200 receipts, to stuff envelopes with badges, receipts, and the like, and to assemble other items typical in a conference packet. With all such materials situated at Columbus College, the Registration committee needed a small van to transport eighteen cartons to Callaway Gardens, twenty-eight miles north of

campus.

If those working on the 1993 meeting had it all to do over again, more of the preparation will be accomplished two-three weeks out rather than 3-5 days before "D-Day."

6. PROMOTE NCTE/GCTE STORE MORE SKILLFULLY

GCTE broke even on its sale of NCTE books, fifteen titles bought in quantities of 5-20 from NCTE which were carefully selected to match the breakdown of attendees (primary, middle, and secondary). In a way, though, the GCTE/NCTE store, got lost in the shuffle. With a packet handout listing and reviewing each title, it would have been easier to draw participant attention to the store. As it turned out, the store benefitted those at the conference (nothing wrong with that) but did not add to conference profits. Something I learned, hypothetically at least, is this: secondary teachers are more inclined to purchase professional books than elementary teachers.

A local vendor made up shirts with the conference logo on spec. He lost money despite a 100-percent cotton product, nice artwork, and fair pricing ($8 each). Shirts were another item which "got lost in the shuffle" and needed more skillful promotion.

7. SECURE MORE COSPONSORS

For Whole Language 3, GCTE was a bit amateurish in recruiting exhibitors as sponsors of breaks, meals, speakers, and so forth. This could have generated up to another $1,500-$2,500 for the conference budget. Other businesses (i.e. Coca Cola) which support education might have been tapped as well.

8. CHARGE EXHIBITORS MORE

In 1991 and 1992, GCTE charged exhibitors only $25 per table. At Callaway Gardens, where exhibit space was limited, we upped the ante to $40. Given the excellent exposure to potential buyers for exhibitors, $75-100 per table would be reasonable for the future.

Opportunities to sponsor/cosponsor breaks, meals, and/or speakers should be made part of the exhibitor registration form.

Though they didn't ask for them, exhibitors should be provided with a list of registrants, or mailing labels if they pay for them.

9. DO A BETTER JOB OF GIVING CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Sponsors and cosponsors of breaks and the karaoke party were noted in the program, of course, but a "bigger deal" should have been made regarding their role, GCTE's gratitude, and so forth. Always cultivate this year's supporters for next-year's events.

10. APPOINT STAFF DEVELOPMENT CHAIR TO NEGOTIATE WITH STATE AND LOCAL SYSTEMS FOR AWARDING CREDIT

We could have provided an additional service to conference attendees if someone had been available to do the paperwork to have Whole Language & More 1993 approved for staff development credit. With this conference, where better than 150 potential registrants were turned away, it wasn't needed. With some events, sdu credit would make a vital difference.